

## PERSUASIVE FARCE

### Dialogical pragmatics in the novels of P.G. Wodehouse

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**Abstract** – This paper explores persuasion, as a speech act, in the novels of the English comic writer P.G. Wodehouse. Persuasion, as a topic for enquiry within linguistics, has been extensively studied, in a variety of social contexts (e.g. Sandell 1977; Jowett and O'Donnell 1992; Messaris 1997; Nash 1989; Hyland 1998; Halmari and Virtanen 2005; Charteris-Black 2006; Tardy 2011). All these studies are either general accounts of persuasion, or else describe its presence as a pragmatic focus in a specific social context, invoking diverse (pragma)-linguistic features to explain its operation. What seems, as yet, relatively under-explored, is its operation in everyday conversational interaction, and this paper represents a move in this direction, though the distinction between authentic and literary data is recognised. It uses an analytical methodology based on Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) and Dialogical Pragmatics (Kecskes 2016) to explore instances in the novels in which Bertie Wooster, Wodehouse's principal character, is persuaded to do various things. What emerges, although not a picture of authentic verbal persuasion as it would occur in actual interaction, but a facsimile that may shed light on some of the discursive processes involved. It is suggested, in fact that, at the level of pragmatics, the processes involved in authentic and literary speech acts are not as different as they are sometimes taken to be.

**Keywords:** persuasion; dialogical pragmatics; speech act theory; P.G. Wodehouse; salience.

## 1. Introduction

Persuasion, as a topic for enquiry within linguistics, has been extensively studied, in a variety of social contexts (e.g., Sandell 1977; Jowett and O'Donnell 1992; Messaris 1997; Nash 1989; Hyland 1998; Halmari and Virtanen 2005; Charteris-Black 2006; Tardy 2011). All these studies are either general accounts of persuasion, or else describe its presence as a pragmatic focus in a specific social context, invoking diverse (pragma)-linguistic features to explain its operation. What seems, as yet, relatively under-explored, is its operation in everyday conversational interaction, though there are methodological reasons why this might be so. The techniques of Conversation Analysis would seem to be suitable for this purpose, but there are two difficulties here. Firstly, traditional Conversation Analysis has been more concerned with understanding the mechanisms of conversation itself, rather than with developing accounts of content features (e.g., Sacks *et al.* 1974; Schegloff 1992). Secondly, its data is collected in a range of real-world contexts, and it is not easy to see how data exemplifying different types of 'persuasion' might be collected.

It must be questioned, at the outset, whether this paucity of available data can be wholly remedied by recourse to literary sources. Conversational interactions in creative fiction are seldom viewed as authentic 'language data', since they clearly lack the necessary quality of scientific objectivity (Lehmann 2004). There are differences in the pragmatic goals of fictitious and actual dialogue: Urbanová (2011, p. 156) found that, while the former serves to reveal the inner worlds of the protagonists, focusing on their identity, status and psychology, the latter emphasise the phatic function, the search for

common ground and social contact. While Biber (2009) asks how far television interactions accurately capture the actual linguistic characteristics of everyday conversation, Rey (2001, p. 138) says that, though television dialogue is clearly not the same as authentic speech, it does ‘represent the language scriptwriters imagine that real women and men produce’. Quaglio (2009, p. 3) argues for close similarities between the linguistic and functional features of natural conversation in both fictional (television) and authentic communication.

From another perspective, moreover, literature offers numerous examples of conversational interactions that exemplify various speech acts - instances of apologies, insults, promises, threats, and so on - and it may be argued that, although the characters, situations and language are invented, the speech acts correspond in most respects to those found in real life. Forchini (2012, p. 37), while accepting the artificiality of movie conversation, argues that it shares with natural speech the capacity to express politeness, emotion, and attitude. It may, then, be counter-productive to ignore data from fictional sources simply out of respect for authenticity.

For example, in *the Life of Samuel Johnson*, Boswell (1992, p. 692) describes an attempt to persuade Johnson to dine with John Wilkes, a prominent political figure whom Johnson regarded as a dangerous free-thinker. His motive, naturally, was to enjoy the conversation that would have followed during their meeting:

I was sensible that he was sometimes a little actuated by the spirit of contradiction, and by means of that I hoped I should gain my point. I was persuaded that if I had come upon him with a direct proposal, ‘Sir, will you dine in company with Jack Wilkes?’ he would have flown into a passion, and would probably have answered, ‘Dine with Jack Wilkes, sir! I’d as soon dine with Jack Ketch.’

Boswell therefore invites Johnson to dine with a mutual acquaintance, to which he agrees, then hints that his acceptance might depend on his finding the company congenial. Johnson objects to the suggestion that he should ‘presume to dictate to a gentleman what company he is to have at his table’. Boswell then says that he ‘should not be surprised to find Jack Wilkes there’, to which Johnson retorts: ‘And if Jack Wilkes *should* be there, what is that to me, Sir?’

Clearly, such transliterated dialogue cannot be considered as data in the same sense as a transcription of a conversation in a pub, for example. However, it undoubtedly constitutes an instance of what Oswald (2014, p. 102) refers to as ‘deceptive communication’ and Chilton (2004, p. 17) ‘Machiavellian communication’, where the propositional content is concealed from the hearer. There are practical difficulties about finding such examples in naturally occurring speaker interaction; the researcher would have to trawl through a considerable corpus of recorded speech before s/he came across a similar episode, or another that exemplifies so clearly one specific type of persuasion.

Having said as much, by way of introduction to a ‘linguistic’ study based on ‘literary’ data, the paper also follows a growing, though still rather minor, current that seeks to explore literature using the tools of linguistics. As Leech and Short say, the usefulness of linguistic analysis of literary texts is not that it may replace the reader’s intuition, but that it may “prompt, direct, and shape it into an understanding” (Leech and Short 2007, p. 4). Early landmarks in this field were works by linguists like Jakobson (1960) and Halliday (1971), while in Watzlawick *et al.* (1967), a work of more relevance to the current paper, a pragmatic lens is taken to *Whose afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The language of Shakespeare was the subject of a recent work (Culpeper and Ravassat 2011), and even P.G. Wodehouse has received critical attention (Partington 2008, 2010).

However, despite the efforts of a specialised journal like *Language and Literature*, the marriage announced, between literary criticism and linguistics,<sup>1</sup> is still some way off.

## 2. Persuasion in the novels of P.G. Wodehouse

Most readers will probably be familiar with the Wodehouse canon and its landscape of human characters, mainly drawn from the ranks of the English idle rich: bachelors with manservants and flats in London, senile aristocrats with dwindling fortunes and nagging sisters; maiden aunts, tennis-playing curates, eccentric bishops, and so on. The tales of his extensive *oeuvre* mostly take place in the vanished world of Edwardian England. His most celebrated character is Bertie Wooster, a young dandy of private means, whose main desires in life relate to trivial matters such as showing off a new jacket at ‘the Drones’, the London club where he meets his circle of friends. He is assisted by Jeeves, an extremely able manservant, who is called upon to disentangle Bertie from the matrimonial or other imbroglios he is constantly falling into.

Farce has been called ‘comedy with the meaning left out’ (Potts 1948, p. 151); it is a genre that involves ‘gross and improbable characterisation’ (Nicoll 1962, p. 88), ‘absurd’ situations (Smith 1989, p. 5), and ‘ridiculous’ behaviour (Dean 1982, p. 482). The Encyclopaedia Britannica’s definition, too, focuses on the ‘ridiculous’ situations in which characters appear, and this is certainly true of Wodehouse’s novels, most of which belong to the farcical genre (Galligan 1985). Persuasion enters the picture when a character objects to appearing in a ridiculous or embarrassing light and needs to be talked into it. For example, in *The Code of the Woosters*, a certain Stephanie Byng, niece of retired magistrate Sir Watkyn Bassett, wants to marry a curate, and is reliant on her uncle’s consent. Curates, however, are not seen as good matches for young ladies of her social class, and Bertie is called on, through Jeeves’ intervention, to help persuade Bassett:

“Sir Watkyn does not like you, sir.”

“I don’t like him.”

“No, sir. But the important thing is that he has conceived a strong distaste for you, and would consequently sustain a severe shock, were you to inform him that you and Miss Byng were betrothed and were anxious to be united in matrimony.” (Wodehouse 2011)

The idea is that, when Sir Watkyn finds out later that this is untrue, his relief will be such that he will consent to his niece’s marriage with the curate. However, it will involve Bertie in an unpleasant interview, and he is understandably reluctant to co-operate. The episode exemplifies two instances of persuasion: Sir Watkyn must be persuaded to consent to his niece’s wedding, and Bertie must be persuaded to collaborate with the scheme. In the end, he is blackmailed into participating; and blackmail will be viewed, below, as an extreme form of persuasion, more accurately seen as a form of *coercion*.

<sup>1</sup> Journal of Language and Literature: online at <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/node/6572/download-pdf>, last vist 12/05/17.

### 3. Speech act theory and dialogic pragmatics

#### 3.1. Persuasion as a speech act

In Austin's terms, speakers use discourse as a form of verbal action, in *insults*, *complaints*, *promises*, *warnings*, and so on. Words, in such cases, are used to perform a specific kind of action, as in the title of the well-known book, *How to do things with words* (Austin 1962). Such speech acts can frequently, as in the examples just cited, be referred to in nominal form (an *insult*, etc.), but this is not possible for the speech act of persuasion: we cannot speak of 'a persuade'. However, as with threats or complaints, there is clearly an illocutionary/perlocutionary dimension to persuasive discourse (Jucker 1997, pp. 122-123). The distinction here, as envisaged by Austin (1962) is between the speaker's intention to persuade (illocution), and the real-world effect that may be produced (perlocution) or, as Cap (2013, p. 53) puts it, between the illocutionary 'force' of a speech act and its perlocutionary 'effect'. Persuasion can be attested by the fact that the target has either 'taken the desired action' or 'admitted to a change of attitude' (Bülow-Møller 2005, p. 28).

Although persuasive speech is a feature of advertising, political speech, propaganda and religious discourse, it is also not uncommonly encountered in everyday conversation (Hardin 2010, p. 155). As Lakoff (1982, p. 11) says, persuasion can be seen as the 'attempt or intention of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of another by communicative means.' In the instances below, the speaker aims to get the hearer to do something (Levinson 1983, p. 240), using what, in Searle's terminology, is known as a directive speech act (Searle 1969).

An attempt to persuade can be considered in terms of four types of condition, described by Searle for the performance of such speech acts. Searle does not, in fact, consider the case of persuasion, but he does deal with requests; and such is the similarity between a request and an attempt to persuade that the conditions for the one transfer readily to the other, as shown in table one:

<p><b>Persuasion</b></p> <p><b>Propositional content:</b> Future act <i>A</i> of <i>H</i></p> <p><b>Preparatory:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>H</i> is able to do <i>A</i>. <i>S</i> believes <i>H</i> is able to do <i>A</i>.</li> <li>2. It is not obvious to both <i>S</i> and <i>H</i> that <i>H</i> will do <i>A</i> in the normal course of events, of his own accord</li> <li>3. <i>H</i> is reluctant to do <i>A</i></li> <li>4. <i>S</i>. is not prepared to accept a first refusal from <i>H</i></li> </ol> <p><b>Sincerity:</b> <i>S</i> wants <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i></p> <p><b>Essential:</b> Counts as an attempt to get <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i></p>
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Table 1

The speech act of persuasion (after Searle 1969: 66-67. *S* = speaker; *H* = hearer).

The only differences between these conditions and those for making a request are in the third and fourth preparatory conditions, which I have added here to Searle's account of the request. A degree of reluctance to do the proposed action is necessary for us to speak of a speech act of persuasion, and the speaker must not be prepared simply to accept a first refusal from the hearer, but must, instead, bring to bear verbal or other resources to overcome this reluctance.

Applying Searle's model to the Stephanie Bing episode just discussed, the picture is as follows:

<p><b>Propositional content:</b> Future act: Bertie telling Sir Watkyn he is engaged to Stephanie</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is possible for Bertie to speak with Sir Watkyn, and both parties know this</li> <li>2. Bertie would not tell Sir Watkyn he wants to marry his niece, of his own accord</li> <li>3. Bertie is reluctant to collaborate (Sir Watkyn is a formidable figure and dislikes Bertie immensely)</li> <li>4. Stephanie is not prepared to accept his refusal, and tries to find a method to convince Bertie to collaborate (she blackmails him)</li> </ol> <p><b>Sincerity:</b> Stephanie wants Bertie to talk to Sir Watkyn.</p> <p><b>Essential:</b> Counts as an attempt to get Bertie to talk to Sir Watkyn.</p>
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Table 2  
Speech act of persuasion in the Code of the Woosters.

### 3.2. Dialogical communication

Alongside speech act theory, the paper also draws on recent research in the pragmatics of communication, which has focused on dialogue, and the knowledge brought to bear by both speaker and hearer in conversational interaction. Kecskes (2016, p. 27) explains the basis of the approach:

pragma-dialogue calls attention to the dialogic nature of communication by emphasizing that interlocutors are actors who act and react. So, the speaker-hearer not only interprets but also reacts to the other interlocutor's utterance. The basic dialogic principle is that human beings are dialogic individuals (social individuals) who communicate in dialogic interaction not only by producing and understanding utterances but also by acting and reacting.

Kecskes (2014, p. 24) says that, in interaction, speaker and hearer are both engaged in constructing models of the other's knowledge of the situational context. Building on work by Bach (2007), he shows that effective communication centres around information that is 'mutually salient' for both speaker and hearer (Kecskes 2016, p. 33). Thus, in the episode where Bertie, having consented to speak with Sir Watkyn, reveals his 'love' for Stephanie, what is salient for both speaker and hearer is the knowledge that Sir Watkyn has a strong dislike for Bertie:

"I'm talking about me and Stiffy."  
 "Stiffy?"  
 "Stephanie."  
 "Stephanie? My niece?"

“That’s right. Your niece. Sir Watkyn,” I said, remembering a good one, “I have the honour to ask you for your niece’s hand.”

“You - what?”

“I have the honour to ask you for your niece’s hand.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s quite simple. I want to marry young Stiffy. She wants to marry me. Surely you’ve got it now? Take a line through that ribbon-like seaweed.”

There was no question as to its being value for money. On the cue ‘niece’s hand’, he had come out of his chair like a rocketing pheasant. (Wodehouse 2011)

Bertie’s use of slang (‘young Stiffy’), is in keeping with his general character and social background. Such linguistic cues are viewed, below, as indexes of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), which position the speaker as belonging to a particular social class or group (Oakes *et al.* 1994). In this case, the social group is that of the idle young rich, of whom Sir Watkyn disapproves. Saliency and participant knowledge, therefore, are also involved in the humorous effect of this passage, since the reader is aware of Sir Watkyn’s attitude towards Bertie, and anticipates his likely response (Palmer 1994; Ermida 2008).

## 4. Types of persuasion in Wodehouse novels

Before returning to *the Code of the Woosters* for more detailed analysis, I shall discuss some instances of different types of persuasion in other works by Wodehouse. As Halmari and Virtanen (2005, p. 7) say, the persuader’s linguistic choices are based on what they observe, or infer, concerning the likely response of the hearer; persuasion therefore has a strategic aspect, where one or more types may be employed in a single instance.

### 4.1. Coercion

One of Bertie’s aunts, Aunt Agatha, frequently persuades Bertie to do things he would prefer not to, simply by the force of her personality. Here, for instance, she drags him away from the joys of Piccadilly in summer:

“The curse has come upon us, Jeeves. She wants me to go and join her at – what’s the name of the dashed place? – at Renville-sur-mer. Oh, hang it all!”

“I had better be packing, sir?”

“I suppose so.” (Wodehouse 1989, p. 420)

This exchange satisfies the third preparatory condition for the speech act of persuasion, in that Bertie’s reluctance to comply with his aunt’s wishes has been overcome, but it borders on another category of speech act: Bertie, in fact, is responding to a *command*, or an *order*, which entails another preparatory condition, i.e., that *H has no choice whether to comply or not*. Of course, Bertie does have a choice; however, the negative consequences of his aunt’s displeasure, if he refuses, are sufficient to rule out refusal as a practical possibility. In cases of coercion, the key feature is the power of the utterer with respect to the hearer (Chilton 2004, p. 45; see also Cialdini 2001, p. 176-180). This may be political or social power; or, as in this case, the psychological influence of one of the participants.

For the same pragmatic reasons, blackmail, a frequent device in Wodehouse’s novels, as we shall see below, can be seen as an extreme form of persuasion, given that in most cases the hearer has no real choice over whether to comply with the speaker’s proposition.

## 4.2. Threats

Another persuasive resource which gives the recipient few responsive options is the threat, which can also be seen in terms of an attempt to oblige the hearer to co-operate by means of methods which are, strictly speaking, more coercive than persuasive. However, if we observe the conditions for the speech act of threatening, we will see points of contact with those for persuading:

<p><b>Threaten</b></p> <p><b>Propositional content:</b> Future act <i>A</i> of <i>H</i> ; Future act <i>B</i> of <i>S</i></p> <p><b>Preparatory:</b> 1. <i>H</i> is able to do <i>A</i>, and <i>S</i> to do <i>B</i>.  <i>S</i> believes <i>H</i> is able to do <i>A</i>, and <i>H</i> believes <i>S</i> is able to do <i>B</i>.  2. It is not obvious to both <i>S</i> and <i>H</i> that <i>S</i> will do <i>A</i> in the normal course of events.  3. <i>B</i> is something that <i>H</i> would prefer not to happen.  4. Negative consequences are announced or mutually known, if <i>H</i> does not do <i>A</i>.</p> <p><b>Sincerity:</b> <i>S</i> wants <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i>.</p> <p><b>Essential:</b> Counts as an attempt to get <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i>.</p>
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Table 3  
Conditions for the speech act of threatening.

Bertie Wooster is fond of fine cuisine, and another aunt has a wonderful French cook. Whenever Dahlia wants to get Bertie to do something for her, she can often persuade him by means of a threat to ban him from her table, as in the following example:

“It seems to me a dashed lot to do for a loved aunt, and I’m jolly well not going to dream - “  
“Oh yes you are, because you know what will happen, if you don’t.” She paused significantly.  
“You follow me, Watson? Well, there it is. Perform this simple, easy task for me, or guests at my dinner table will be saying: “Why is it that we never seem to see Bertie Wooster here any more? Bless my soul, what an amazing lunch that was that Anatole gave us yesterday!”  
(Wodehouse 1989, pp. 216-17)

The persuasive force of any threat depends on its perceived strength, from the hearer’s perspective. In this case Bertie is being asked to steal something, with a real risk that a spell in prison will result from his failure. It is characteristic of his general outlook on life that he sees Aunt Dahlia’s threat as giving him no choice but to obey her wishes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This subversion of regulative social norms is, arguably, central to the humour of P.G. Wodehouse. The behavioural codes associated with Bertie’s old school (Eton) are frequently contrasted with the laws of the land. Offences such as stealing a policeman’s helmet, on Boat Race night, are viewed as pranks that raise the miscreant’s social esteem among his fellows. It is entirely consistent with Wooster’s behavioural codes that the prospect of banishment from Anatole’s cooking is sufficient to make him break the law.

### 4.3. *Blackmail and emotional blackmail*

Wodehouse's novels frequently contain instances of blackmail, a persuasive/coercive resource in which the hearer is compelled to act in a way s/he would rather not because the persuader knows a damaging secret about them. An important character in *The Code of the Woosters*, for example, is Roderick Spode, a caricature of a 1930s dictator, who threatens Bertie and his friends with physical violence, and is ultimately brought under control by Jeeves discovering that he secretly designs ladies' underwear for a store in London. As Bertie puts it:

“You can't be a successful dictator and design women's underclothing.”

“No, sir.”

“One or the other. Not both.” (Wodehouse 2011)

Ordinary blackmail is persuasive because of the loss of face that would result to the recipient from a revelation of his secret. The emotional kind operates by creating psychological tension in the hearer. The blackmailer suggests that s/he 'ought' to do something they are reluctant to do, appealing to factors in the hearer's psychological make-up that relate to ethical codes, principles and so forth. Failure to do the required thing will entail a loss of self-esteem. Bertie went to Eton in the Edwardian period, and absorbed a certain code of behaviour, the morality expressed in phrases like 'play the game', 'not cricket', and 'never let the side down' (Gathorne-Hardy 1978). In *The Code of the Woosters*, he is persuaded to own up to stealing a policeman's helmet - and thereby risk being sent to prison:

“Bertie, surely you aren't going to be difficult about this? You're much too good a sport. Didn't you tell me once that the code of the Woosters was 'Never let a pal down'”? She had found the talking point. People who appeal to the code of the Woosters rarely fail to touch a chord in Bertram.” (Wodehouse 2011)

Again, it is characteristic of Bertie's general approach to life that it is more important to him to be seen as a 'good sport' than to obey the laws of the land.

### 4.4. *Aristotelian factors: Ethos, Pathos and Logos*

It is also of interest to view persuasion in Wodehouse's novels through an Aristotelian lens, using the well-known categories of Ethos, Pathos and Logos (Aristotle 1954), an approach that still has a place in modern discourse analysis (Gurak 1999; Biber *et al.* 2007). Ethos is that respect due to the character of the speaker, as Aristotle (1954, p. 25) wrote: “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible”. To observe it in operation, we need first to focus briefly on the complex plot of another novel, *The Inimitable Jeeves*. One of Bertie's friends, Bingo Little, wants to marry a waitress, something which his bed-ridden uncle, on whose financial support Bingo depends, would deplore. Jeeves suggests that Bingo read the uncle romantic stories where marriages defy class conventions, to prepare him to accept his nephew's plans. Bingo tells his uncle that Bertie is the author of the stories, operating under a pseudonym to avoid publicity. Since the uncle has conceived a profound respect for the writer, his ethos with the sick man is raised, to the point where the following exchange takes place:

“You think it’s all right for a chappie in what you might call a certain social position to marry a girl of what you might describe as the lower classes?”

“Most assuredly I do, Mr Wooster.”

I took a deep breath, and slipped him the good news.

“Young Bingo - your nephew, don’t you know - wants to marry a waitress,” I said.

“I honour him for it”, said old Little. (Wodehouse 1989, p. 417)

Aristotle (1954, p. 25) wrote that “persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions”; this represents the ‘pathos’ component of persuasive rhetoric. In a later episode, Bertie is asked to heal a rift between Bingo and his uncle, who still believes Bertie to be his favourite authoress, and thereby bring about the restoration of Bingo’s allowance. Bertie explains the reason for his visit, and is waiting for Mr Little to reply. Meanwhile, Mr Little is reading:

He toyed with the book, and it fell open at page two hundred and fifteen. I couldn’t remember what was on page two hundred and fifteen, but it must have been something tolerably zippy, for his expression changed and he gazed up at me with misty eyes, as if he’d taken a shade too much mustard with his last bite of ham.

“Very well, Mr Wooster,” he said. (Wodehouse 1989, p. 570)

Mr Little becomes ‘misty-eyed’, softened by some pathetic emotion, and he is persuaded to give his consent, although persuasion here is clearly also due to Mr Little’s respect for Bertie’s ethos as the (supposed) author of this moving fiction.

Finally, there is the appeal to ‘logos’, or rational argument, which Aristotle (1954, p. 25) considered the principal of the three factors. He says that truths, or apparent truths, must be proved by means of “the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question”. In the following extract from *The Inimitable Jeeves*, Aunt Agatha adds rational argument to her coercive personality:

“It is young men like you, Bertie, who make the person with the future of the race at heart despair. Cursed with too much money, you fritter away in idle selfishness a life which might have been made useful, helpful and profitable. You do nothing but waste your time on frivolous pleasures. You are simply an anti-social animal, a drone. Bertie, it is imperative that you marry [...] You should be breeding children to –” (Wodehouse 1981, p. 25)

This fragment is a kind of enthymeme, since the argument contains an implicit proposition, as follows:

SINCE: Bertie is wasting a potentially useful life in idle selfishness

And SINCE: (implicit preposition) a useful life is one that involves marriage and bringing up children

THEREFORE: Bertie should get married

The persuasive force of such arguments rests, in part, on the perceived level of their logical coherence, and on the degree that the perception is shared between speaker and hearer. Since Bertie and his aunt do not share the same notion of what constitutes a useful life, it is unlikely that he will be convinced by this argument. Therefore, his subsequent co-operation with his aunt’s wishes in this matter must be explained by some other factor; in this case, the force of her personality.

## 5. Speech acts and dialogical pragmatics in *The Code of the Woosters*

We can now return to the scene in *The Code of the Woosters* (Wodehouse 2011) where Stephanie, having persuaded Bertie to prepare the ground for her, presents her uncle with other arguments to support her attempt to convince him that she should marry the curate. Analysis will focus on the most salient feature of the shared knowledge each participant brings to the argumentation, together with analysis of the speech act/s involved.<sup>3</sup>

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Sir Watkyn	'In the first place, you are far too young - '	Stephanie's age
Stephanie	'What nonsense. Three of the girls I was at school with were married last year. I'm senile compared with some of the infants you see toddling up the aisle nowadays.'	

Table 4  
Extract one.

The speech act here is an instance of 'counter-argument', advanced by Sir Watkyn, to his niece's argument, that she should be allowed to marry the curate. The salient discursive feature is her age, and the two clearly disagree over a proposition which remains at an implicit level during this exchange. Seen from Sir Watkyn's point of view this can be stated: *since Stephanie is below the age at which she is able to decide for herself, I must decide for her*. From Stephanie's point of view, it is as follows: *since I am old enough to decide for myself who I marry, I alone must make the decision*. Kecskes (2016) uses the terms 'utterer implicature' and 'hearer implicature' to express the meanings the speaker wishes to convey, and what the hearer understands, respectively. Sometimes lack of convergence in this sense may produce misunderstandings; here, it produces lack of agreement and the persuasive attempt fails.

In terms of argumentation theory, Stephanie produces what Toulmin (1958) calls 'backing' for her contention that she is old enough to decide for herself by mentioning the fact that younger girls than her are getting married. Sir Watkyn, meanwhile has, in support of his contention, the circumstance that he is legally responsible for Stephanie. This real-world fact concerning the relationship between the two participants is salient throughout the exchange; since, if it were not so, there would be no need for any persuasive attempt to be made.

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Stephanie	'But what have you got against Harold?'	Harold is a curate
Sir Watkyn	'I have nothing, as you put it, against him. He seems zealous in his duties and popular in the parish - '	
Stephanie	'He's a baa-lamb.'	
Sir Watkyn	'No doubt.'	

Table 5  
Extract two.

<sup>3</sup> For reasons of space, the speech acts will not be presented in the same detail as above but will simply be identified.

In a speech act we might term ‘interrogation’, Stephanie shifts the argument to the suitability of Harold as a possible husband. The way she frames the question attributes bad motives to Sir Watkyn, implying that his disapproval is due to some unreasonable prejudice on his part. Sir Watkyn’s reply wards off the implicit reproof, and he shows he has no ill-will towards Harold by praising his zeal and acknowledging his popularity. However, he does so in a way that underlines Harold’s social position - his duties, both parties know, are those of a curate, and his popularity is circumscribed to that specific social sphere, referenced by Sir Watkyn via the phrase ‘in the parish’. At this point, what is salient for both participants is the fact that ‘Harold is a curate’. The next contribution from Stephanie attempts to shift Harold from that social role; to be a ‘baa-lamb’ is not a typical attribute of a curate. It is an expression of her affection for him, thereby positioning him as a possible romantic partner, and Sir Watkyn’s cool response is a rebuff, leading Stephanie to change tack:

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Stephanie	‘He played football for England.’	Harold is a curate
Sir Watkyn	‘Very possibly.’	

Table 6  
Extract three.

The speech act Stephanie performs here is ‘providing information’. The salient fact, as in the last extract, is that Harold is a curate. By providing this information about him, Stephanie aims to show her uncle that Harold is no ordinary curate: since very few curates play football for England, he must have special talents. These talents, she implies, raise him from the social category of ‘curate’ to a more promising category, that of ‘possible husband’. Sir Watkyn’s curt reply implies recognition, but rejects this utterer implicature. The utterer implicature of his ‘very possibly’ can be summarised as follows: *he may have played football for England, but he’s still only a curate.*

The same analysis applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Stephanie’s next attempt:

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Stephanie	‘And he’s marvellous at tennis.’	Harold is a curate
Sir Watkyn	‘I dare say he is. But that is not a reason why he should marry my niece’.	

Table 7  
Extract four.

In a speech act of ‘asking for information’, Sir Watkyn now moves the argument onto a practical topic:

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Sir Watkyn	What means has he, if any, beyond his stipend?’	Harold is a curate
Stephanie	‘About five hundred a year.’	
Sir Watkyn	‘Tchah!’	
Stephanie	‘Well, I don’t call that bad. Five hundred’s pretty good sugar, if you ask me.’	

Table 8  
Extract five.

Once again, the salient fact here relates to Harold's occupation, underlined by Sir Watkyn's use of the term 'stipend', which relates to the moneys received by a clergyman, and thereby explicitly positions Harold in this social group. The implicature of his expletive at Stephanie's response conveys the meaning: *that is hardly sufficient for him to be making matrimonial plans*. Stephanie's response shows that she has understood this meaning, and attempts to rebuff it.

In the next move, speaker and hearer shift to a discussion of the importance of money. The implicature of Stephanie's first contribution, in the speech act of 'assertion', is that the reason Sir Watkyn objects to her marrying Harold is his lack of money:

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Stephanie	'Besides, money doesn't matter.'	Money is an important factor in matrimony
Sir Watkyn	'It matters a great deal.'	
Stephanie	'You really feel that, do you?'	Sir Watkyn does not like Bertie
Sir Watkyn	'Certainly. You must be practical.'	
Stephanie	'Right ho, I will. If you'd rather I married for money, I'll marry for money. Bertie, it's on. Start getting measured for the wedding trousers.'	

Table 9  
Extract six.

At this point, Stephanie plays her trump card, exploiting her knowledge of Sir Watkyn's deep dislike of Bertie. Effectively, she presents her uncle with an argument that is a type of 'false alternatives' logical fallacy (Damer 2005, p. 126), because her implicature is: *since you are preventing me from marrying the man I love, I will marry a man whom I know you dislike intensely - the choice is yours*. However, this is by no means a watertight argument, and Sir Watkyn, if he were able to think clearly, might have objected that other alternatives besides marrying Bertie could be available. Clearly, however, the shock produced by Stephanie's move of re-introducing Bertie as a possible partner is considerable, and leads to her final victory in the argument:

Speaker	Dialogue	Salience
Stephanie	'Bertie is rolling in the stuff and, as you suggest, one might do worse than take a whack at the Wooster millions. Of course, Bertie dear, I am only marrying you to make you happy. I can never love you as I love Harold. But as Uncle Watkyn has taken this violent prejudice against him - '	Sir Watkyn does not like Bertie
Sir Watkyn	'My dear child, don't talk such nonsense. You are quite mistaken. You must have completely misunderstood me. I have no prejudice against this young man Pinker. I like and respect him. If you really think your happiness lies in becoming his wife, I would be the last man to stand in your way. By all means, marry him. The alternative - '	

Table 10  
Extract seven.

It is noticeable here that Sir Watkyn, for the first time, alters his representation of Harold, from terms that position him as 'a curate' to the phrase 'this young man Pinker'; acknowledging, that is, that he has some existence beyond his lowly social role. By adding that he 'likes and respects him', moreover, he implicitly raises Harold's social prestige to the level at which he becomes an acceptable suitor for his niece.

There may, then, be a cumulative dimension to persuasion; it is not clear if Stephanie would have achieved her purpose if she had begun her persuasive attempt with her final, conclusive argument. There may be something to be said for engaging in manoeuvres during an argument, in an exchange of micro-moves of attack and defence, so that the interlocutor's resistance is progressively lowered.

## 6. Conclusion

In terms of the above-mentioned debate over the status of literature as linguistic data, I hope the foregoing analysis has shown that literary examples may have a role to play in studies of the mechanisms of conversation or, as here, of persuasive argumentation. Although the dialogues are clearly invented, the operation of salience, and of the other pragma-dialogical features, are arguably analogous to that of the same features of authentic conversation or argument. Kecskes himself makes frequent use of data from television shows or films. Literary and other types of fiction, at times, present interactions of this kind in a form which lends itself to the kind of analysis carried out here. As was said at the outset, it is not easy to see how one might collect authentic data that would permit a similar analysis.

By focusing on the dialogical pragmatics involved in speech acts, at the level of single moves in argumentation, we have seen how effects at the pragmatic level depend on the interplay between utterer and hearer implicature. We have also seen the usefulness of salience as an analytical tool: speaker and hearer orient their understanding of what is going on in interaction around a shared dimension of mutual knowledge, whose contours are delineated by the blend of speaker/hearer implicature, and which shift as the dialogue progresses. Salience not only accounts for the pragmatic operation of the processes whereby exchanges of meaning occur in conversational action, but it also represents a basic tool whereby such processes may be appreciated by the analyst.

Persuasion, in this study, emerges as a complex convergence of speaker and hearer, around propositions that frequently remain at an implicit level. The successful persuader tries various argumentative approaches until s/he finds the right key to unlock the hearer's resistance. This clearly involves not simply mastery of a range of persuasive techniques but also a deep knowledge of what Jeeves generally terms 'the psychology of the individual'.

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